

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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INFO AMEMBASSY KIGALI
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0281

E.O.: 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, BY, CG
SUBJ: PRESIDENT BAGAZA'S REACTION TO INCURSION INTO ZAIRE

REF : BUJUMBURA 261 (NOTAL)

1. REFTEL WAS IN ERROR IN SAYING BURUNDI RADIO AND NEWS BULLETIN HAD GIVEN ROUTINE COVERAGE TO NEW STORIES ON AMRED INCURSION INTO ZAIRE FROM ANGOLA. IN FACT, MEDIA HAVE BEEN WHOLLY SILENT, THROUGH CHIEF EDITOR OF BULLETIN HAS PROMISED TO PRINT A "SYNTHESIS" MARCH 18.

2. POINTING TO THIS SILENCE, I CHIDED PRESIDENT BAGAZA DURING OUR MARCH 17 MEETING FOR BURUNDI'S SEEMING INDIFFERENCE TO MILITARY ACTION AGAINST AN ALLY. BURUNDI DID NOT HAVE TO TAKE SIDES RIGHT AWAY, BUT IT SHOULD AT LEAST PRINT OR BROADCAST STORIES FROM NEWS AGENCIES WHICH WOULD INFORM THE CITIZENRY THAT A SERIOUS SITUATION MIGHT BE DEVELOPING IN A NEIGHBORING STATE.

3. BAGAZA SAID THAT HE LISTENED TO THE VOA AND FRANCE INTER, AND HENCE HE AND MANY OTHER BURUNDIANS KNEW WHAT
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HAD BEEN REPORTED. OF COURSE BURUNDI WANTED TO STICK TO ITS ALLY ZAIRE, WHITH WHICH HE HAD PLEDGED TO CONCERT FOREIGN POLICY WHEN THEY HAD RECENTLY INAUGURATED THE TRIPARTITE COMMUNITY (WITH RWANDA). IN FACT, BURUNDI WOULD ALWAYS BE LINKED TO EVENTS IN ZAIRE, NO MATTER WHETHER HE AND MOBUTU, OR OTHERS, WERE PRESIDENTS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES. NOW, HOWEVER, THE SITUATION WAS CONFUSED; EVEN

SECRETARY VANCE HAD STATED THAT THE U.S. DID NOT KNOW WHO WAS BEHIND THE INCURSION. BURUNDI HAD TO THINK ALSO ABOUT MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH ANGOLA. MOREOVER, BURUNDI HAD NOT YET BEEN ASKED TO DO ANYTHING SPECIFIC BY MOBUTU, THOUGH ITS AMBASSADOR IN KINSHASA HAD INSTRUCTIONS TO SEE FONMIN NGUZA TO INQUIRE.

4. BAGAZA CONTINUED THAT THESE MATTERS WERE VERY DELICATE. ZAIRE, LIKE ALMOST ALL AFRICAN COUNTRIES, WAS TORN BY TRIBAL, REGIONAL, AND PERSONAL DIFFERENCES. THESE CLASHES OF INTEREST AND OUTLOOK HAD CAUSED GREAT TROUBLES SINCE ZAIRE'S INDEPENDENCE IN 1960, AND BURUNDI HAD EVEN HELPED OUT WITH TROOPS IN 1967 (AGAINST THE SCHRAM MERCENARIES IN BUKAVU). NOW, HOWEVER, BURUNDI WOULD WAIT TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON. THIS WAS SEPARATE FROM PUTTING THE NEWS ON THE MEDIA; HE HAD GIVEN NO ORDERS TO PREVENT THAT.

5. COMMENT: EVEN IF THE PRESIDENT DID NOT GUIDE THE NEWS COVERAGE, THE INFORMATION MINISTER ALMOST SURELY DID, AND IT IS CLEAR THAT ALL TOP OFFICIALS BELIEVE THE ZAIRE AFFAIR TO BE A VERY HOT POTATO. BAGAZA'S ALLUSION TO A ZAIRE WITHOUT MOBUTU AS PRESIDENT, AND HIS OTHER REMARKS ABOUT THE WEAKNESS OF THE FAZ, IMPLY A PREOCCUPATION WITH A SUDDEN TURNOVER OF REGIME THERE. BURUNDI IS ALSO SENSITIVE NOT ONLY TO ITS RELATIONS WITH ANGOLA (IT SUPPORTED THE MPLA BEFORE MOST AFRICAN STATES), BUT ALSO AWARE OF TANZANIA'S DISTASTE FOR MOBUTO AND OF THE PROXIMITY TO BURUNDI OF ANTI-MOBUTU REBELS IN THE LAKE TANGANYIKA AREA. GIVEN THESE FACTORS, I WOULD AT MOST
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EXPECT THE UNAVOIDABLE MINIMUM OF FORMALISTIC BURUNDIAN SUPPORT FOR ZAIRE'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, BUT NO MORE.
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